

# WHAT IS FIELD HOCKEY?



## FIELD HOCKEY IS:

- The **third** most popular sport in the world, behind soccer and cricket, and has approximately 2 billion fans from 140 countries.
- An Olympic Sport for men and women, played in the summer games since 1908 as one of the original team sports. USA will host the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.
- One of the most gender equal sports in the world. The rules and equipment for men and women are the same.
- Called “hockey” everywhere except in the United States, Argentina and Canada.
- Played in multiple competition formats including indoor, outdoor and Hockey5s.
- Played in approximately 300 NCAA colleges in the United States, as well as 150+ college club teams.
- Played in 1,700+ United States high schools by more than 50,000 female athletes as a fall sport. Some states offer co-ed high school play.
- An inclusive sport providing opportunities for all ages, and for those with intellectual and physical disabilities.
- Easy to learn and affordable, with minimal equipment needs.
- A safe sport, with a low rate of serious injuries and concussions.
- Governed by USA Field Hockey, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and Pan American Hockey Federation (PAHF).
- **FUN!** To get into the game and learn more about the sport, visit [usafieldhockey.com](http://usafieldhockey.com).



**FIELD HOCKEY IS A SPORT FOR ALL, A SPORT FOR LIFE!**

# ABOUT USA FIELD HOCKEY



**USA Field Hockey works to promote and develop field hockey as a sport for all, a sport for life.  
Mission: Grow the Game. Serve & Inspire Membership. Succeed Internationally.**

## USA FIELD HOCKEY:

Is the National Governing Body (NGB) for the sport in the United States, as appointed by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC)

Is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership-based organization, with more than 30,000 individual members and 300+ member clubs

Values all stakeholders, partners and sponsors, with tools and resources for athletes, parents, coaches, umpires, administrators and fans

Fields Junior and Senior U.S. Men's and Women's National Teams to compete in high-level international events in outdoor, indoor and Hockey5s competition formats

Hosts and sanctions year-round playing and development opportunities throughout the United States including:

- Premier Regional and National Events for athletes of all ages - youth through adult
- Nexus: USA Field Hockey's Olympic Development Pathway program primarily for female athletes, with the inclusion of males
- Boys development pathway programming
- All Starz: USA Field Hockey's disability inclusion program

Focuses on safety, mandating background checks and SafeSport training to keep participants safe on and off the field

Supports grassroots growth, developing a system of regional representation in the form of State Chapters to help make field hockey more affordable and accessible to all

Offers Coach and Umpire Education for all levels, beginner to elite, with opportunities to coach or umpire at regional, national and sanctioned events

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**Join USA Field Hockey today!**

Visit [usafieldhockey.com](http://usafieldhockey.com) learn more, take advantage of member benefits, and join the field hockey family.



USA Field Hockey was recognized as a Project Play Champion for youth programming.

[usafieldhockey.com](http://usafieldhockey.com)

# FIELD HOCKEY BASICS

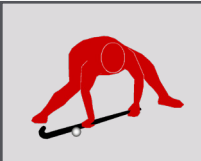


## BY THE NUMBERS

<b>11</b>	<b>Players per side</b> (including goalkeeper)
<b>4</b>	<b>Quarters</b> (two 15-minute quarters each half)
<b>5<sup>or</sup> 10</b>	<b>Minute halftime</b>

## STOPPING THE BALL (defensive)

**Block Tackle** - Player lowers the stick close to the ground and uses the length of the stick to block a ball's advance. Using the entire stick widens the area available to intercept or steal the ball and slows the offensive player's motion.



**Jab Tackle** - Player jabs the stick toward the ball with left hand extended (flat side up), then quickly returns both hands and regains a balanced position. This swift motion can disrupt the advance of the play and possibly cause a loss of possession.

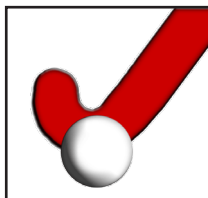


**Reverse Tackle** - Used when an offensive player is on a defender's weak (left) side, defensive player extends left arm out with stick inverted close to the ground to slow the play, block the ball's path and try to cause a loss of possession.



For more information and rules, visit [usafielddhockey.com](http://usafielddhockey.com).

## STICK BASICS



There is no such thing as a left-handed stick.

Only push or hit with the flat side or edge of the stick.

Only goalies can use their body to stop and move the ball.

Good stick skills and passing are key to success.

## MOVING THE BALL (offensive)

**Push** - This skill is executed with player's hands apart. The head of the stick stays in contact with the ball as it is pushed and there is no backswing. This allows for good control, quick movement and is used for accurate passing or shooting.



**Hit** - A powerful motion where the stick is brought down swiftly from a back swing and strikes the ball with a long follow through. The hit is fast and favored for sending the ball long distances or for making a hard shot on goal.



**Lift, Flick, Aerial** - A skill in which the ball stays in contact with the head of the stick as it is lifted into the air. There is no back swing. Lifts are used primarily to raise the ball over long distances or as shots on goal.



**Forehand Sweep** - Commonly used on turf or a smooth playing surface, player lowers stick parallel to ground and hits the ball with a circular motion. A sweep allows for more power than a push, making it effective for quick yet long hard passes and shots.



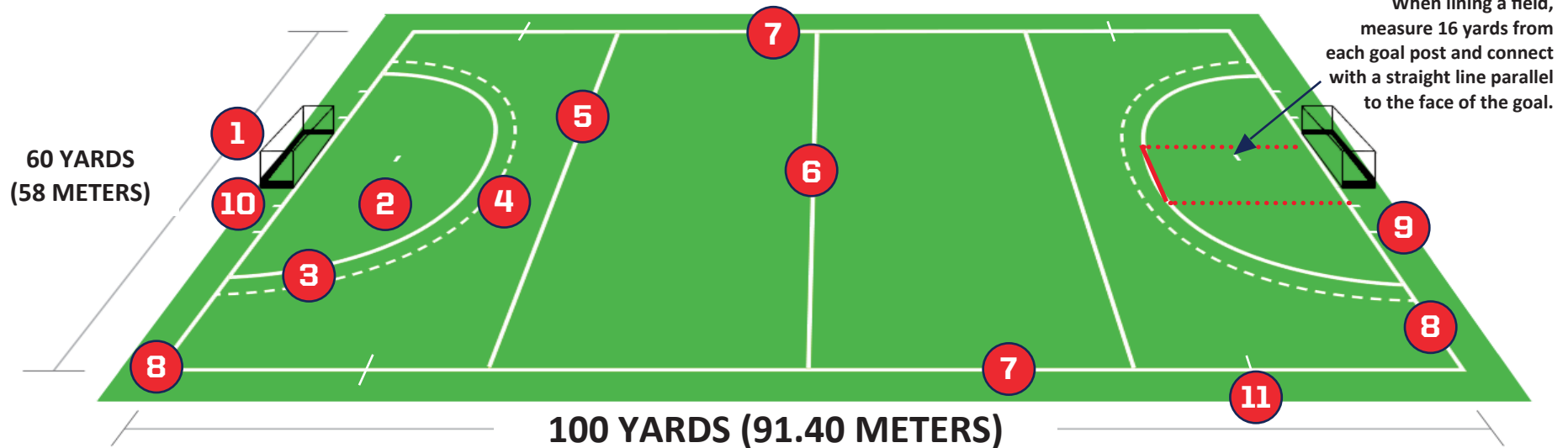
**Reverse Sweep** - Player uses the same motion as the forehand sweep with the ball starting on player's left side. Player uses a different grip and must use the side of the stick with the flat side up. This is an effective hitting action used for passing and shooting.



**Drag Flick** - This specialty skill is used by advanced players to shoot along the ground or into the air on a penalty corner. It can be as powerful as a hit yet requires no back swing, making it especially deceptive. It's an important skill to develop for high level competition.



# THE FIELD



Field hockey is played on a rectangular field, 100 x 60 yards, called a **pitch** or **field**. Although traditionally played on grass or turf, the game has many variations and can be enjoyed on any flat surface, even a beach. Internationally, field hockey is played on a water-based turf field that is watered regularly to speed up the game and prevent the ball from bouncing.

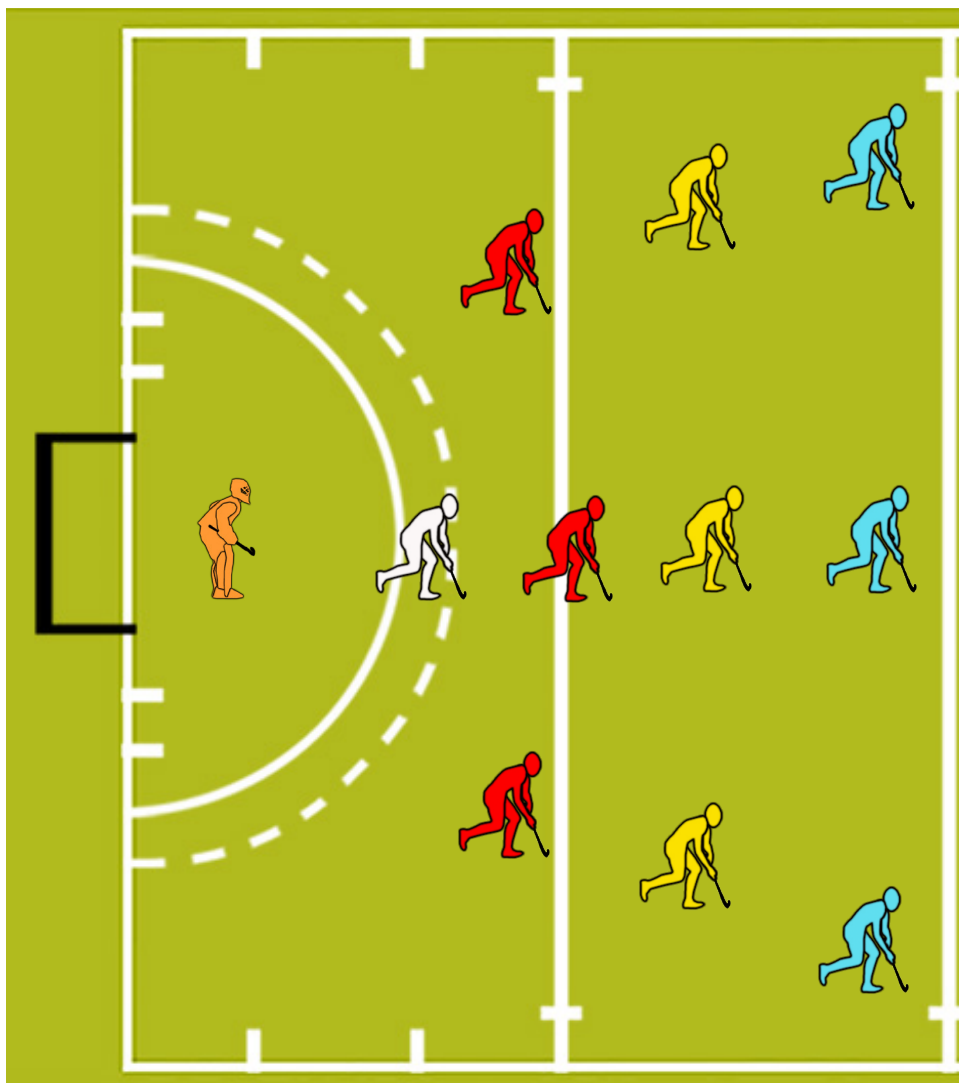
- 1 Goals** - Goals are 7 feet high, 12 feet wide and 4 feet deep. In addition to nets, goals have an 18 inch board lining the bottom inside sides and back. The goal sits just behind the end line, not on it.
- 2 Stroke mark** - Dash centered in front of each goal, 7 yards from the goal line marking the position where a penalty stroke is taken.
- 3 Scoring circle or "D"** - A solid, "near" semi-circle surrounding the goal 16 yards from the goal. **Note the top of the circle is flat across the face of the goal.** Only balls hit or deflected into the goal within this circle are a score. Defensive fouls within the scoring circle result in a penalty corner.
- 4 5-yard mark** - A dash-lined semi-circle 5 yards outside the scoring circle. Penalty corners end when the ball crosses the 5-yard mark.
- 5 25-yard line** - Intentional or repeated fouls from this line to the near end line result in a penalty corner.
- 6 Center line** - Solid line that divides field in half. The ball is taken from the middle of this line at the beginning of each half and after a goal.
- 7 Sideline** - Boundaries along the length of the field marking the side of the field of play. If a ball is hit out, the opposing team brings it in with a pass or self-start. Players feet can be outside of sideline as long as the ball is inside or on the line.
- 8 End line** - Boundaries along the width of the field. Offensive hits that cross this line result in defense getting the ball at 16 yards. Defensive hits that cross this line result in either a long corner or penalty corner, if deemed intentional.
- 9 Corner mark** - Short dashes 11 yards (10 meters) from the edge of each goal cage that mark the place from which penalty corners may be inserted.
- 10 Defender mark** - Short dash 5.5 yards (5 meters) from the edge of each goal marking the closest position which a defender may stand to the inserter on a penalty corner.
- 11 16-yard line** - These 12 inch marks identify the 16-yard line where 16-yard free hits are taken.



# PLAYER POSITIONING



## SAMPLE FORMATION (3-3-3-1)



## FORMATIONS

Although player positions have defined primary responsibilities, field hockey is a fluid game and players have the flexibility to traverse the field. Defenders can be viable scoring threats, midfielders help defend and score goals and forwards fall back to aid the defense. Teamwork and communication are critical and more important than positions or formations.

A coach often sets formations based on the skill and strength of the players and the opposing team. Any formation is acceptable, and all positions are important. A coach may opt to play four forwards (potentially a 4-3-3 formation with four forwards, three midfielders and three defenders), a 3-4-3 with three forwards, four midfielders, three backs, or even a 3-3-3-1 with a defensive “sweeper.”

## POSITIONS



### Forwards (Attackers or Strikers)

Offensive position whose primary responsibility is to advance play toward the goal and convert the opportunities created with fellow players into goals.



### Midfielders (Middies)

Both an offensive and defensive position who acts as an initial line of defense as well as advances the ball to the forwards and opposing side of the field.



### Defenders (Backs)

Defensive position whose primary responsibility is to protect the goalkeeper, prevent opposing forwards from getting into scoring position and advance the ball to the midfielders and forwards.



### Sweeper (Cover or Back)

Some formations include one player who traditionally is positioned either behind or in front of the defensive line and whose primary goal is defense.



### Goalkeeper (Goalie)

Defensive position whose primary responsibility is to prevent opponents from scoring and to coordinate defenders in the defense of the goal.

# INDOOR FACTS



Indoor field hockey and traditional outdoor field hockey are two different but related games utilizing similar skills and tactics. Many people play indoor to supplement their outdoor game, particularly in areas where outdoor play is not available year-round.

Indoor play is increasing significantly around the world at the youth and adult levels. The game is fun and fast, exciting to play and watch.

## Main differences in play:

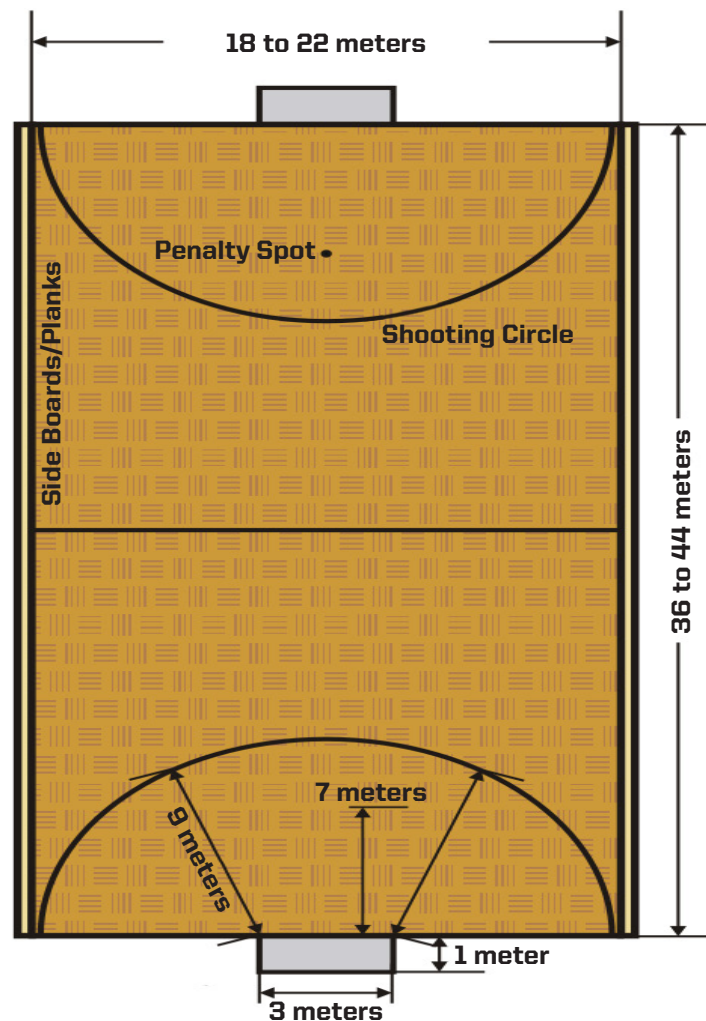
Indoor is played on a hard surface, such as a gym floor, with sideboards. The ball is played off the boards.

The indoor playing surface or “court” is significantly smaller than an outdoor field.

Indoor is a small sided game that is typically played 6v6, unlike outdoor, which is played 11v11.

Players cannot lift the ball in indoor, except when taking a direct shot on goal.

Indoor players must push the ball, hitting is not permitted.



## Main differences in equipment:

Indoor goals are smaller - 3x2x1 meters compared to 4x2x1 meters for outdoor.

Indoor balls are slightly lighter. A regular stick can be used, but more advanced players prefer a special thinner and lighter stick for indoor play.

Players more frequently wear gloves and shoes appropriate for indoor surfaces.

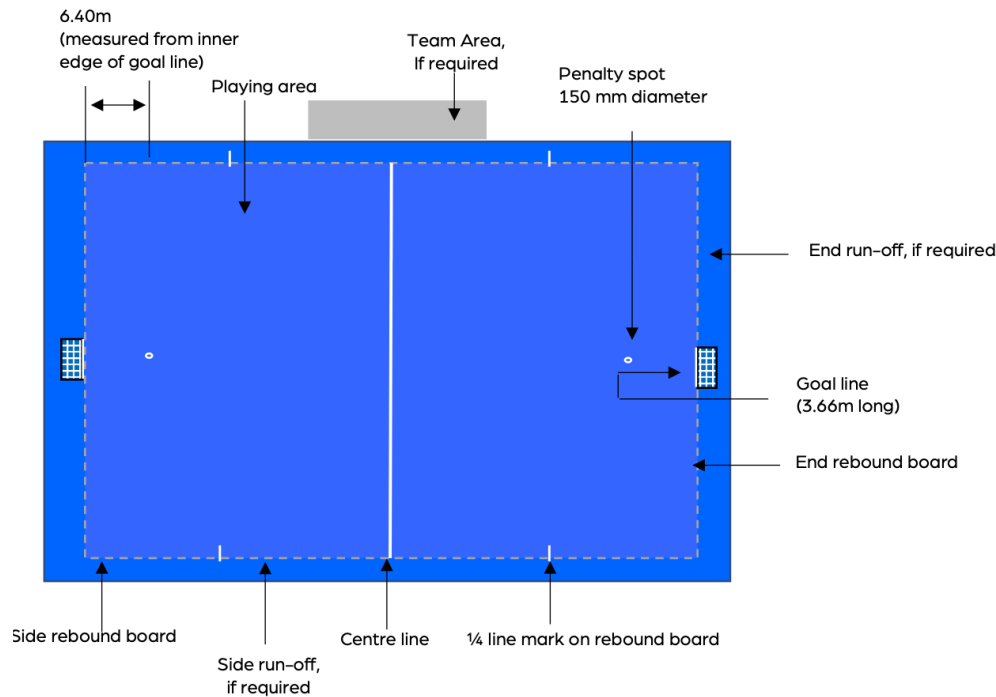
Note that goalkeeping equipment, corner masks, shinguards and mouth guards are the same for indoor, outdoor and Hockey5s

**For more information about indoor hockey, do-it-yourself board construction and a complete list of rules, go to [usafielddhockey.com](http://usafielddhockey.com).**

# HOCKEY5s



Hockey5s is a small-sided outdoor game and the newest international competition format. It's fast, fun and flexible, requiring fewer players and less space than the traditional 11v11 outdoor game. Debuting to rave reviews at the 2014 Youth Olympic Games, Hockey5s is growing in popularity around the globe, with aspirations to become a second hockey discipline in future Summer Olympic Games. The first FIH Hockey5s World Cup was played in 2024.



## Equipment:

Outdoor goals, goalkeeper and player equipment and balls are the same as 11v11 hockey.

Corner masks are not necessary as there are no penalty corners in Hockey5s

At the elite level, 10" boards surround field to keep the ball in constant play. Recreational play does not require boards.

## Main differences in play:

Hockey5s features five athletes per team – four field players and a goalkeeper.

The playing surface or "pitch" is smaller than a traditional 11v11 field, so two pitches can be made out of one full-sized field. An international competition, the Hockey5s pitch is approximately 45x30 yards, though recreational pitch sizes can vary and should be 35 x 20 yards minimally.

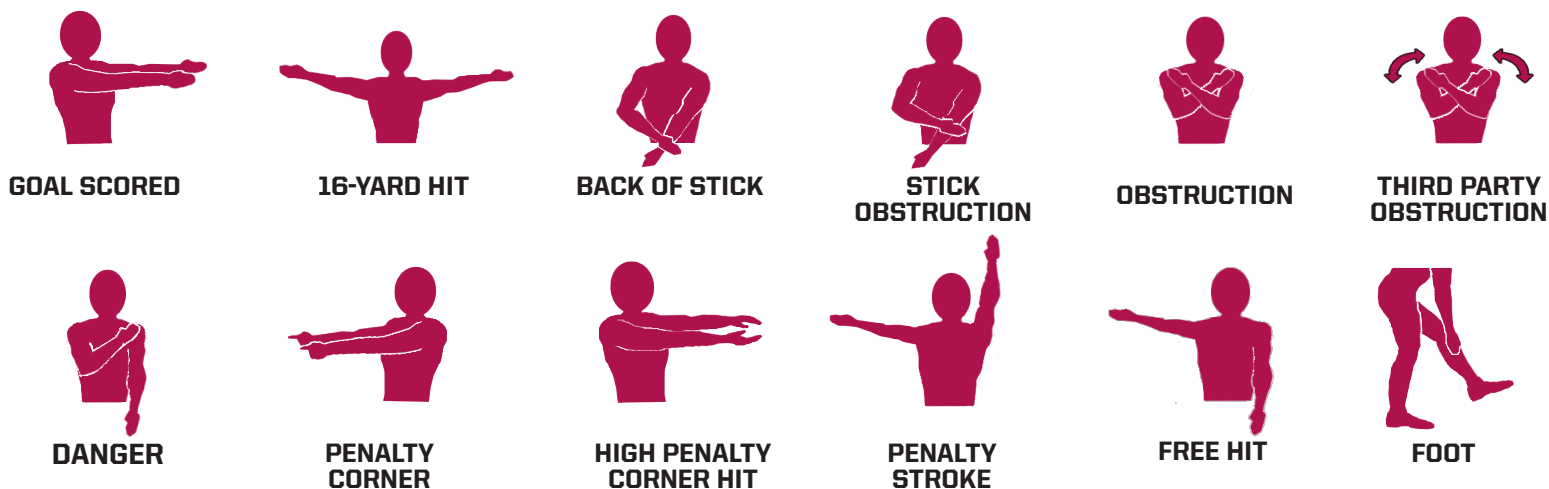
Hockey5s can be played on any surface, such as a multi-purpose turf field, grass, or any hard surface such as a gym, or paved lot.

Pitch markings are designed to be minimal. The only required markings are a half-field line, goal lines between the goal posts, and quarter pitch marks to create four equal size areas, plus penalty spots 7 meters from the from the goal lines.

Rules are modified to maximize speed and minimize stoppages in play. Rules and pitch markings can be found at [usafielddhockey.com](http://usafielddhockey.com).

**For more information and resources, go to [usafielddhockey.com](http://usafielddhockey.com) or [fih.ch/growhockey/hockey5s](http://fih.ch/growhockey/hockey5s).**

# FOULS & UMPIRE SIGNALS



### PENALTY CARDS

Field hockey uses a three card system for player warnings and suspensions for deliberately dangerous play, unsportsmanlike behavior and repeated violations.

<b>GREEN</b>	Player must leave the field for 2 minutes and the team plays short (no replacement).
<b>YELLOW</b>	Player leaves for at least 5 minutes (at the discretion of the official) and the team plays short.
<b>RED</b>	Player leaves the game and cannot be replaced. They may be suspended for subsequent games.

**Goal Scored** - Signaled when the ball entirely crosses the goal line as a result of a hit or deflection by an offensive or defensive player within the scoring circle.

**16-Yard Hit** - A free hit awarded to the defense when ball goes over the end line after last being touched by an offensive player.

**Back of Stick** - Called any time a player touches the ball with the back (rounded) side of the stick.

**Stick Obstruction** - Called when a player hits or obstructs an opposing player's stick with their own when making a play on the ball. This can be called on an offensive or defensive player.

**Obstruction** - Called when a player possessing the ball uses their body to prevent an opposing player from making a play. The player with the ball cannot stop their motion or push back and opposing player must be actively trying to get the ball.

**Third Party Obstruction** - Signaled when a player intentionally or unintentionally uses their body to block an opposing player from access to the player possessing the ball.

**Danger** - A broad rule that encompasses any action or situation in which a player puts other players in danger of injury. For example, tripping, wild swings or similar actions. Intentional acts could result in a card and/or a penalty stroke.

**Penalty Corner** - A scoring opportunity awarded to the offensive team when the defense commits a foul within the scoring circle, or an intentional foul within the 25-yard line.

**High Penalty Corner Hit** - On the initial hit on a penalty corner, the ball must cross the goal line no higher than 18 inches for a goal to be scored. Drag flicks are not considered "hits" and can be higher.

**Penalty Stroke** - Awarded when a defensive player commits a penalty preventing a goal or commits an intentional foul in the circle. The ball is placed on the 7-yard mark and one offensive player takes a free shot against the goalkeeper.

**Free Hit** - Awarded when a foul is committed outside of the scoring circle (unless intentional within the 25-yd line). Opposing players must stay at least 5 yards away until the ball is hit or the player touches the ball once (self-starts).

**Foot** - The most common penalty, called when the ball hits a player's foot causing an advantage for their team. If there is no advantage, the umpire may choose to hold their whistle and play on.



# THE EQUIPMENT

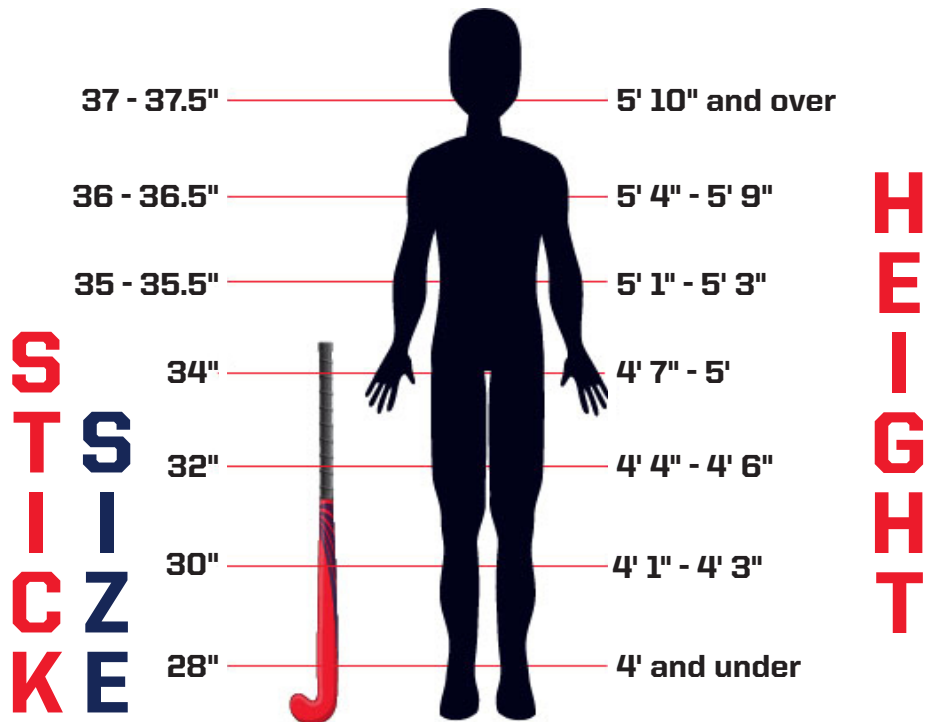


## STICKS

Field hockey sticks are rounded on one side and flat on the other. They come in a wide range of lengths to fit any size or age player. It's important for a player to use a stick that is comfortable in length. A stick that is too long will be difficult to maneuver. A stick that is too short may also be awkward and limit power. There is no such thing as a left-hand stick. Beginner sticks are usually constructed of wood and are lightweight, less rigid and more forgiving, making it easier for a beginner to stop and control the ball. As players develop, they will understand what kind of stick works best for them and move on to a more powerful, composite stick. Stick length, style and weight is based on individual preference. This is just a general guide to appropriate stick length.

### STICK SIZING AND SELECTION

Stick length, style and weight is based on individual preference, but this is a general guide for beginners, based on player height.



### BALLS

Field hockey balls are made of plastic. They are usually white or orange, although they can be any color that contrasts with the playing surface. Some balls are smooth and some are dimpled to reduce aquaplaning on wet surfaces. Different balls may be used for development training and play.

### MOUTH GUARDS

Mouth guards are required to be worn to prevent dental injury.

### SHINGUARDS

Hard plastic shinguards are traditionally worn by all field players to protect against balls and sticks hitting the shins.

### GLOVES

Optional, worn to protect hands, improve grip and stay warm.



### CORNER MASKS

Corner masks are required to be worn by defensive players while defending penalty corners. The masks are removed and thrown out of play when the penalty corner play is over.

### EQUIPMENT STORE

To make the game affordable and accessible to all, USA Field Hockey sells beginner equipment, including plastic and wood sticks and the oversized GO Ball, accessories and more.

**SHOP NOW**

Many players like to measure appropriate stick length from the ground to their hip bone. Before investing in a stick, consult with your coach, field hockey equipment manufacturer or retailer. Most adults of any height prefer sticks that are between 36-37.5\".

# GOALKEEPING EQUIPMENT



**CHEST PROTECTOR**

**HELMET**

**STICK**

Goalkeeper sticks can be slightly different from a field player's stick. The speciality curved blade provides extra stopping area for saves. A regular stick can also be used.

**MOUTH GUARD**

**THROAT PROTECTOR**

**BLOCKERS & GLOVE**

**JERSEY**

Goalkeepers must wear a different colored jersey for easy visual distinction.

**ARM GUARDS**

**PANTS & GIRDLE**

Girdle is worn under pants.

**KICKERS**

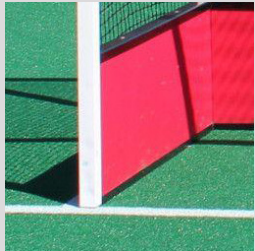
These are worn over shoes.

**LEG GUARDS**



**Goalkeeper equipment must fit well allowing the goalkeeper maximum mobility and protection.**

# THE OFFICIAL GOAL



An official field hockey goal is 2.1 meters (7 feet) high, 3.7 meters (12 feet) wide and 1.2 meters (4 feet) deep. 18-inch high boards line the inside of the goal on both sides and the back, and a tight net lines the remaining space of the goal.

Goals may be constructed of different materials but are commonly made of aluminum or wood. They tend to be heavy, sitting flat on the ground so they are safe and secure. As a result, they often have wheels so the goals can be moved by tipping and rolling.

When placing a goal onto a field, make sure the front edge of the goal sits outside the field, abutting the back of the goal line. The goal should not be on the goal line, as a ball needs to completely cross the goal line to be considered a goal.

## 18-INCH BOARDS

The sound of the ball hitting the boards when a goal is scored is unique to field hockey. But many ask, why do goals have boards?

The 18-inch boards on the inside bottom of the cage play an important role during penalty corners, and the rule is often confusing to beginners. If, during a penalty corner, the first shot at goal is a hit (as opposed to a push, flick or scoop), the ball must cross the goal line, or be on a path which would have resulted in it crossing the goal line, at a height of no more than 18 inches (the height of the backboard) before any deflection, for a goal to be scored.

The requirements of the rule apply even if the ball touches the stick or body of a defender before the first shot at goal.

If the first shot at goal is a hit and the ball is, or will be, too high when crossing the goal line, it must be penalized even if the ball is subsequently deflected off the stick or body of another player.

The ball may be higher than 18 inches during its flight before it crosses the goal line provided there is no danger and provided it would drop of its own accord below 18 inches before crossing the line.

For second and subsequent hits at the goal and for flicks, deflections and/or scoops, it is permitted to raise the ball to any height but this must not be dangerous.



Outdoor Goal

## INDOOR GOALS

Goals for indoor field hockey are smaller. They are 3 meters (9.8 feet) wide, 2 meters (6.6 feet) high and a minimum of 1-meter (3.3 feet) deep. Boards are not mandatory for indoor.

# MORE FACTS ABOUT FIELD HOCKEY

## Quick Facts

**Popularity:** Field hockey is the third most popular sport in the world, behind soccer and cricket, and has approximately 2 billion fans.

**Terminology:** Field hockey is called just *hockey* everywhere except in the United States, Argentina and Canada.

**Olympic Sport:** Field hockey is an Olympic Sport for men and women, played in the summer Games since 1908 as one of the original “team” sports. The United States is hosting the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games – and field hockey will be played!

**Men & Women:** Field hockey is one of the most gender equal sports in the world. The rules and equipment for men and women are the same.

## Levels

**Boys & Girls:** Many member clubs and programs offer youth play, for boys and girls, for as young as 8 years old. USA Field Hockey is increasing the opportunities for boys to participate at regional, national and sanctioned events.

**HockeyID/ParaHockey:** USA Field Hockey is growing inclusion through the All Starz Field Hockey program, welcoming the formation of both adaptive and unified teams, for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities.

**High School:** Field hockey is played in more than 1,800 high schools by more than 50,000 female athletes. Some states offer co-ed programming.

**College:** Field hockey is an NCAA varsity women’s sport at approximately 300 colleges and universities, and growing. Hundreds of colleges offer recreational and competitive club field hockey.

**Adult:** Adults and Masters, for those out of college and over 35 years of age, opportunities and international competition continues to grow. USA has an adult league called US Field Hockey League (USFHL), with clubs playing nationwide to qualify for the Adult National Club Championship.

## Competition Formats

Field hockey is played in multiple competition formats, and all are complementary, fun and fast.

- Outdoor 11v11 is the format played in middle and high schools, NCAA colleges, internationally and the Olympic Games.
- Smaller-sided versions played in World Cup competitions include Indoor (6v6) and Hockey5s (5v5), which are growing in popularity domestically and internationally for both genders.
- In the United States, youth 7v7 offers developmental play with fewer people on the pitch or court to allow more touches.

**Playing Surfaces:** Field hockey is played and enjoyed on many surfaces, for both indoor, outdoor and Hockey5s. For outdoor, it is played on synthetic turf and grass. Indoor is played on hard courts, including gym floors or sport court. Hockey5s is played on synthetic turf, grass and sometimes sand-based turf.

## Governance

**International Hockey Federation:** The FIH is the governing body for the sport in the world, with 146 member countries.

**Pan American Hockey Federation:** PAHF is the governing body for the sport in the Pan American region.

**USA Field Hockey:** The National Governing Body (NGB) for the sport in the United States and is a member of FIH and PAHF.

**Rules:** The FIH is responsible for writing and updating the international rules. The NCAA and National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) make slight rule modifications to best serve the game at their respective levels.

**Safety:** Field Hockey is considered one of the safer sports, with minimal serious injuries when compared to other sports.

## Support USA Field Hockey!

[Click here to learn more about the organization, join as a member, view the member benefits, make a donation or become a sponsor.](#)